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The Sacrifice of Christ in African Perspective
A Contribution to the Atonement Debate

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Abstract

The notion of “sacrifice” is highly controversial in the contemporary Western evangelical discussion. In recent debates about the doctrine of atonement, two American theologians and leading critics of penal substitution – Mark Baker and Joel Green – have argued that the concept of sacrifice is of limited value for explaining the meaning of atonement in Western contexts. Although they recognize that the concept of sacrifice powerfully communicates the saving work of Christ in African contexts, they believe that there are limitations as to what African reflection on sacrifice can contribute to substantive theological issues. In Africa, however, the notion is prevalent across a wide range of theological traditions. The work of three African theologians – John Ekem, Edison Kalengyo, and Mercy Oduyoye – challenges Baker and Green’s understanding of sacrifice in five important ways. First, they challenge their metaphorical approach to sacrifice with their dialogical typological approaches. Second, they challenge their focus on ritual sacrifice with their attention to both ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice. Third, they challenge their reduction of sacrifice to moral self-giving with their emphasis on multiple themes. Fourth, they challenge their association of sacrifice and death with their strong association of sacrifice and life. Finally, they challenge their focus on understanding and articulation with their deep concern for worship and everyday life.

Key words: African theology, atonement, Lord’s Supper, ritual sacrifice, salvation, sacrifice, sacrifice of Christ, self-sacrifice

Introduction^[1]

The notion of “sacrifice” is highly controversial in the contemporary Western evangelical discussion. In recent years there have been heated debates about the doctrine of atonement, especially the theory of penal substitution, which is seen by many evangelicals as central to their theology, but which has come under increasing criticism from within the evangelical constituency. In the course of these debates, some of the leading critics of penal substitution have argued that the concept of sacrifice is of limited value in explaining the meaning of the atonement in Western contexts. Mark Baker, an American theologian, and Joel Green, an American biblical scholar, argue that because ritual sacrifice is foreign to most Westerners, the metaphor of sacrifice has little impact on their lives, except in the sense of moral self-giving. Although they recognize that the concept of sacrifice powerfully communicates the saving work of Christ in African contexts, they believe that there are limitations as to what African reflection on sacrifice can contribute to substantive theological issues.^[2] In Africa, however, the notion is highly popular across a wide range of theological traditions. Since the third wave of evangelization first reached African shores in the middle of the eighteenth century, sacrifice has been a key theme in missionary and African theological discourse. Biblical scholars have wrestled with the relation between biblical and African concepts of sacrifice, liturgical theologians have focused on the appropriation of Christ’s sacrifice in the celebration of the Eucharist, and systematic theologians have reflected on the meaning of Christian sacrifice in African social contexts.^[3]

In this chapter, I explore how African stories of sacrifice challenge Western stories of sacrifice by examining how the work of three African theologians challenges Baker and Green’s understanding of sacrifice, as well as their rather disparaging assessment of what African theological reflection can contribute on substantive theological issues. I take an intercultural approach, setting up an “encounter” between thinkers from different times and places for comparison.^[4] First, I discuss the notion of sacrifice, explaining why it is so controversial and developing an interpretive framework for a theological approach. Next, I examine the story of sacrifice in the work of Mark Baker and Joel Green, arguing that their approach does not do justice to the notion of sacrifice in either Western or African cultures. Finally, I examine the stories of sacrifice in the work of John Ekem, a Ghanaian mother-tongue biblical scholar, Edison Kalengyo, a Ugandan inculturation theologian, and Mercy Oduyoye, a Ghanaian women’s theologian. I argue that they challenge Baker and Green’s understanding of sacrifice in five important ways. First, they challenge their metaphorical approach to sacrifice with their dialogical typological approaches. Second, they challenge their focus on ritual sacrifice with their attention to both ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice. Third, they challenge their reduction of sacrifice to moral self-giving with their emphasis on multiple themes. Fourth, they challenge their association of sacrifice and death with their strong association of sacrifice and life. Finally, they challenge their focus on understanding and articulation with their deep concern for worship and everyday life.

The Notion of Sacrifice

One reason that the notion of sacrifice is so controversial in Western discussions is related to the question of metanarrative. In modern thought, there are several overarching accounts of sacrifice that make competing claims about the acceptability of the concept.^[5] The first metanarrative of sacrifice is a Christian one. African church fathers, such as Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine, played a key role in developing the idea that the sacrifice of Christ ends and fulfils all sacrifice. As John Rogerson writes,

Christian interpretation of Old Testament sacrifice was necessarily allegorical from an early period. On the one hand, the sacrifice of Christ had summed up and rendered unnecessary all the sacrifices of the Old Testament; on the other hand, the details of all sacrifices . . . could be interpreted in terms of the Incarnation and Passion.^[6]

Augustine, for example, interprets both Isaac and the ram in the story of the *Akedah* as types of Christ.^[7] During the European Reformations, both Protestant and Catholic Reformers generally followed this account: “Reformation interpretation of sacrifice, while being less allegorical and more concerned to describe the rituals themselves, nonetheless regarded Old Testament sacrifice as a synchronic scheme looking forward to the sacrifice of Christ.”^[8] Both Protestant and Catholic Reformers, however, treated the concept of sacrifice as an immanent and fully grasped principle. For Luther, Christian sacrifice was primarily the penitential offering of the self with and in Christ; for the Council of Trent, it was the offering of Christ in the Mass. Both superimposed their respective concepts of sacrifice on Hebrew beliefs and practices, which limited the extent to which the latter could enrich the former.^[9] During the modern era, theologians have continued to use the Christian metanarrative as an interpretive framework for understanding sacrifice, both in the Bible and in other cultural traditions. Furthermore, allegorical interpretation has been given fresh impetus with the development of typology and figural interpretation.^[10]

In the modern era, a new evolutionist metanarrative of sacrifice emerged. Early anthropologists, such as Edward B. Tylor, drew on the work of Charles Darwin and earlier thinkers to construct general theories of religion. Over time, “lower” forms of sacrifice, such as ordinary gift giving, were understood as necessarily giving way to “higher” forms, such as abnegation. Furthermore, “higher critics” of the Old Testament, such as Julius Wellhausen, took a similar approach to the history of Hebrew sacrifice. Originally sacrifice was a natural, spontaneous, private affair which involved giving to God and sharing a meal.^[11] Through a process of centralization and spiritualization, sacrifice was transformed into moral self-giving.^[12] For Wellhausen, the true sacrifice is “resultless self-sacrifice and resigned obedience” for others, the church, and ultimately the nation state.^[13] The idea of spiritualization, which assumes an essence of sacrifice, a spiritual and ethical kernel that can be freed from the shell of ritual practice, has continued to be influential. The evolutionist account of sacrifice, however, has been criticized for merely historicizing and reconceptualizing the Christian metanarrative. Consequently, some theorists argue that the concept of sacrifice should be renounced entirely. As the historian of Greek religion Marcel Detienne writes,

the notion of sacrifice is indeed a category of the thought of yesterday, conceived of as arbitrarily as totemism – decried earlier by Lévi-Strauss – both because it gathers into one artificial type elements taken from here and there in the symbolic fabric of societies and because it reveals the surprising power of annexation that Christianity still subtly exercises on the thought of these historians and sociologists who were convinced they were inventing a new science.^[14]

Nevertheless, the ethnographer of African religion Luc de Heusch argues that this conclusion may be too hasty and suggests that a minimum definition of sacrifice, such as “the immolation of a human or animal victim,” enables a researcher to study a phenomenon that occurs in many different contexts.^[15] As he writes, “one must listen patiently to the ideological speeches of a multitude of sacrificers, in the most diverse societies, before reaching a conclusion.”^[16]

A second reason that the notion of sacrifice is so controversial in Western discussions is the question of class. Many researchers have approached sacrifice as a conventional monothetic class. In such a class, members must have a certain characteristic or series of characteristics in common in order to belong to that class. In recent years, however, there has been a growing consensus that sacrifice is actually a polythetic class.^[17] In a polythetic class, members may share a number of characteristics that occur commonly in other members, but no single characteristic is essential for belonging to that class. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of family resemblance is helpful here. I am the eldest of five brothers. Although people often claim that it is easy to tell that we are all Busseys, they find it difficult to say precisely why. No one feature is common to us all; rather, there are a series of overlapping similarities. As the Anglican theologian John Milbank argues, “sacrifice is not a pure, intact genus.”^[18] A minimum definition of sacrifice, like that of de Heusch, can identify

“a cultural feature nearly always present, and sufficiently distinctive to be recognizable,” but “it does not at all follow that a universal feature must possess a universal identity, and then a universal meaning and explanation.”^[19] If sacrifice is a polythetic class, a theological approach to sacrificial phenomena must resolutely avoid modern essentializing and generalizing tendencies. As Stephen Sykes writes, “the first thing a Christian theologian must learn is to resist the temptation to try to create a basic structure to which they all conform.”^[20]

A third reason that the notion of sacrifice is so controversial in Western discussions is related to the question of scale.^[21] As the historian of religion Jeffrey Carter observes, “the process of understanding is always comprised of a series of choices over how to construct generalities out of diversity.”^[22] For the researcher approaching the subject of sacrifice, the singularity and variability of the empirical data are simply bewildering. The sociologist Michael Bourdillon indicates that there is a multitude of ideas and practices associated with it – for example, a gift to a deity, a means of controlling death, substitution, a communal meal, and a means of releasing or getting rid of power.^[23] Different theorists make different decisions about what themes to include and what to ignore. Large-scale approaches involve significant generalization to account for as much diversity as possible. Small-scale approaches pay attention to the complexity of a particular case. As Carter writes, “there are different, and equally legitimate, ways to answer the question of scale. How a researcher answers this question, the choices he or she makes regarding which details (differences) can be legitimately generalized (seen as similar), lies at the root of diverging understandings.”^[24] Small wonder, then, that those different understandings of sacrifice abound, from the grand theories of sacrifice of the modern era to more modest recent attempts. If sacrifice can be approached using a variety of scales, a theological approach must be sufficiently dialogical if it is to do justice to the wide variety of stories, practices, and concepts of sacrifice in different cultures and come to a fuller understanding of the sacrifice of Christ. As Milbank writes, “in the face of many different cultures Christian sacrifice discovers many different modes of fulfilment, and so itself again, as possibly arrived at by an *infinity* of different narrative routes.”^[25]

The Atonement Debate: Mark Baker and Joel Green

Next, we turn to the work of Mark Baker and Joel Green.^[26] In their book *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, Baker and Green bring together their New Testament expertise and contextual experience to address the question of how to understand and communicate the saving significance of Jesus’s death in the twenty-first century. As they observe,

As is often the case in our use of the New Testament, our use of tradition frequently falters because, rather than learn how the theological task has been undertaken and exemplified, we attempt instead to carry into our own lives and pronouncements models and metaphors that belong to another age and that are dead to us. Metaphors work within cultures where a shared encyclopedia, or cultural narrative, can be assumed. Crossing cultures sometimes requires new idioms, working with fresh ways of conceptualizing and communicating.^[27]

On the one hand, they call attention to the multiplicity of metaphors in the New Testament; on the other hand, they argue that not all the metaphors and models found in the Scriptures and Christian tradition are equally suitable in contemporary contexts. In particular, they argue that the penal substitution model and the metaphor of sacrifice often associated with it are of limited value for explaining the meaning of the atonement in Western contexts.

Baker and Green take a metaphorical approach to sacrifice. They introduce their main section on metaphor as a response to concerns raised by feminist theologians about atonement imagery, especially its implications for our understanding of who God is and how we approach human relationships. They argue that these concerns are legitimate but observe that their criticism of atonement theology “reflects our common problem of dependence on metaphorical language to communicate what is beyond language.”^[28] Drawing on the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Baker and Green state that metaphors “highlight and hide” certain aspects of a concept.^[29] Two interpretive principles follow from this. First, “no one metaphor will capture the reality of the atonement.” Interestingly, they use sacrifice as an example: “Metaphors from Israel’s sacrificial system communicate something important about the death of Jesus, but they cannot contain the profundity of the cross of Christ.”^[30] Second, “not all properties are necessarily embraced or legitimated in a given use of a metaphor.”^[31] The ransom saying in Mark 10:45, for example, does not explicitly address who pays the ransom, or to whom it is paid. Furthermore, following Lakoff and Johnson, they emphasize the contextual nature of metaphor: “metaphors for the atonement in the New Testament are implicit comparisons that rely on larger systems of thought and are grounded in life in the world.”^[32] Consequently, a metaphor must be read “according to the right frame.”^[33] Baker and Green’s metaphorical approach is helpful in that it calls for careful attention to atonement metaphors in contemporary culture and causes them to engage with perspectives from around the world, but it seems to contribute to a spiritualizing tendency in their treatment of sacrifice.

Baker and Green’s story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of contextual atonement: Since the fall, the relationship

between God and humans has been broken by sin. To resolve this estrangement, atonement is necessary. God provides a sacrificial system for Israel through which atonement can be made. But ritual sacrifice is not the only way of restoring or maintaining the relationship with God. In the history of Israel, the notion of the “sacrifice of obedience” emphasizes acts of obedience rather than acts of ritual sacrifice. Outside Israel, there are also notions of heroic self-giving and human sacrifice. Jesus’s faithfulness and obedience to death, even death on a cross, becomes the exemplar of moral self-giving.^[34]

In Baker and Green’s view, the New Testament interpretations of Christ’s saving work as a sacrifice are primarily related to concepts of ritual sacrifice, which poses problems for using the notion of sacrifice to explain the meaning of the atonement today.^[35] As they write,

Sharply put, to speak of “sacrifice” today may be to use the same terms as those used in the first-century world, but spoken in the context of modern-day America, those words can hardly mean the same thing. Unlike those who were trafficked in the temples of Israel and the Roman world, we are people for whom the butchery of animals lies outside the realm of common experience.^[36]

On the other hand, Baker and Green recognize that the concept of sacrifice powerfully communicates the saving work of Christ in African contexts. Drawing on the autobiography of Kisare, a Mennonite bishop from Tanzania, Baker and Green write, “The concept of the cleansing and reconciling power of Jesus’ death on the cross was easily understood by the people because of the role blood sacrifice had played in the traditional religion and culture of the predominant tribe – the Luo.”^[37] In contrast to Western contexts, where sacrifice is often understood in terms of satisfaction or penal substitution as a payment to God, in the Luo context sacrifice is understood as “a way of removing a barrier or curse – a cleansing of the consequences of an evil action.”^[38] Nevertheless, Baker and Green stress that although articulating the sacrifice of Jesus in terms of sacrificial ritual might be helpful in a Luo context, it would not have the same impact in a North American context. Rather, “Kisare’s story challenges us to find images and models as effective in our setting of mission as this sacrificial imagery was in his.”^[39] The only notion of sacrifice they find helpful is the idea of ethical self-sacrifice in C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In this story, Aslan, the great lion and a Christ figure, willingly dies in a human traitor’s place to save his life. For Baker and Green this shows that “Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself, suffer death in our place according to the rules of the world, to release us from the grasp of evil.”^[40]

Baker and Green have been major voices in the evangelical atonement debate from the beginning, and their work has generated considerable response.^[41] They argue that the concept of sacrifice is of limited value for explaining the meaning of the atonement in Western contexts. Still, their approach does not do justice to sacrifice in either Western or African cultures. Their use of metaphor theory seems to contribute to a spiritualizing tendency in their treatment of sacrifice, which drives a wedge between ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice. They focus on the former in their understanding of the atonement and are quick to label sacrifice a “dead metaphor” in Western contexts because ritual sacrifice is unfamiliar to most people.^[42] Nevertheless, even a cursory glance at the news suggests that it continues to be an important concept in many different spheres of life, from politics to sport, to the coronavirus pandemic.^[43] Moreover, the notion of “sacrifice” is discussed across a wide range of academic fields, from biblical studies to philosophy, to anthropology, psychology, and even evolutionary biology. Furthermore, while they allow for an understanding of sacrifice as moral self-giving, they mainly associate sacrifice with death and do not explore the kind of life that results from sacrifice. Their focus is strongly on understanding and articulation, with little attention to worship and everyday life. For this, we must turn to some African stories of sacrifice.

Mother-Tongue Biblical Theology: John Ekem

First, we turn to the work of John Ekem.^[44] In his book *New Testament Concepts of Atonement in an African Pluralistic Setting*, Ekem reflects on “the vital subject of atonement” from an explicitly African Christian perspective.^[45] He begins with a working definition of atonement. Rather than confining himself to one particular theory, he casts his net as wide as possible, describing atonement as “an all-inclusive soteriological concept involving the entire scope of God’s redemptive work in Christ from the Incarnation to Christ’s present heavenly ministry, and even beyond that.”^[46] He views it as “a holistic, multifaceted event that transcends time and space.”^[47] Furthermore, he observes that “a death-centred approach to atonement is . . . woefully inadequate for the African situation where life leads into death and death into life.”^[48] In his work, he seeks not only to contribute to New Testament scholarship on biblical concepts of atonement but also to reevaluate the translation of several biblical texts into Ghanaian languages. In the process, he develops a programmatic hermeneutical approach for African biblical interpreters and highlights the need for contextual insights to be made available to nonacademic African readers through commentaries and study notes.^[49]

Ekem develops his hermeneutical approach through discussions of the cosmic Christology in Colossians and the

priestly Christology in Hebrews. He explores the relationship between “Christ” and “culture,” opting for what Emmanuel Martey has described as a dualist view, in which they exist in a paradoxical relationship.^[50] Ekem argues that although Christ can be encountered in any human culture, “he does not necessarily superimpose himself on those cultures, but is perceived with the eye of faith and borne witness to within a people’s existential circumstances.”^[51] Ultimately, he finds a model for African biblical hermeneutics in the creative typological approach of the author of Hebrews. He argues that the author was “an innovative thinker, aware of, and in dialogue with alternative world-views within his community.”^[52] In particular, the author treats Old Testament characters and events as “types of Christ and temporary anticipations of the Gospel” in a context characterized by religious pluralism.^[53] In addition to his hermeneutical approach, Ekem has developed a novel exegetical method, which he terms “dialogical exegesis.”^[54] In short, his method involves the following:

1. An examination of texts from a cross-cultural hermeneutical perspective whereby the biblical and other worldviews (e.g. African) are brought face to face with the principle of reciprocal challenge (*intercultural/cross-cultural hermeneutics*).
2. Dialogue between the translated texts and their “originals” with a view to ascertaining their points of convergence and divergence as well as their impact on the community of faith (*intertextual dialogue*).
3. Bringing the insights of (1) and (2) to bear on the development of context-sensitive study Bible notes and commentaries (*applied hermeneutics*).^[55]

Ekem’s hermeneutical approach and method are important for understanding his “dialogical typological” approach to sacrifice. In contrast to Baker and Green’s approach, which superimposes the notion of ethical self-giving on other sacrificial systems, Ekem stresses the need for constructive dialogue with other stories, practices, and concepts of sacrifice in a dynamic and open-ended encounter that enables a richer understanding of Christ’s sacrifice.

Ekem’s story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of cosmic salvation: since the fall, humans and the entire created universe have been corrupted by sin. For humanity and the cosmos to be saved, reconciliation must occur. Sacrifice is one of several ways in which reconciliation can be achieved. Before the birth of Jesus, God revealed something of his saving activity in the history of Israel and the histories of other nations. This saving activity reached its fulfillment in the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus. Now humans can do the will of their Creator through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the continuing intercessory ministry of Jesus.^[56]

Ekem’s most detailed discussion of sacrifice is in his article on Romans 3:25a, in which Paul describes Jesus as a *hilastrion*. Western debates on this verse often remain at an impasse as to whether the term *hilastrion* should be interpreted in a propitiatory or an expiatory sense.^[57] Ekem suggests that these options hardly exhaust the meaning of the term.^[58] He presents translations of the verse into European and Ghanaian languages, examining how they render *hilastrion*. Some Ghanaian translations bring out interesting aspects of the term but none are quite satisfactory. Ekem then analyses the sacrificial concepts among the Abura-Mfantse of Ghana.^[59] There is a general word for sacrifice which can be understood as “an expression of gratitude for what the benevolent spirit world has done,” but also as “that act of giving which expects nothing in return.”^[60] The sacrificial system also includes a number of concepts related to propitiation, expiation, and reconciliation. Furthermore, there are popular legends about people who willingly gave themselves to be offered as sacrificial victims to save their people from a calamity.^[61] Consequently, Ekem argues that a better translation of *hilastrion* would be *ahyanmuadze*. This term refers to the object of replacement or substitution on behalf of the group or individual. As he writes,

considering the idea that God takes the initiative to “put Jesus forward” as a means of *hilastrion* through his blood, which event should be *appropriated by faith for justification to be operational in a person’s life*, it seems to me that *ahyanmuadze* offers the most appropriate register for the process described in Rom. 3.25a. In this sense, Jesus becomes God’s means of *ahyanmuadze* through his sacrificial death. Precisely, he functions as God’s potent revelatory means of atonement through his vicarious, substitutionary and representative death on the cross.^[62]

Thus, *hilastrion* becomes “a representative revelatory sacrifice.”

Ekem’s main contribution is his dialogical typological approach. This allows him to envisage more clearly the significance of Christ’s sacrifice within the Christian tradition than in the Abura-Mfantse tradition. He pays careful attention to both concepts of ritual sacrifice and stories of self-sacrifice in his interpretation of Jesus’s sacrifice. Translating *hilastrion* as “a representative revelatory sacrifice” leads to a richer understanding of Christ’s sacrifice, both for Abura-Mfantse Christians and Christians around the world. Jesus’s sacrifice is not merely a pacifying sacrifice, but “God’s potent revelatory means of atonement.”^[63] Ekem’s dialogical typological approach also means that he pays attention to multiple themes related to Abura-Mfantse sacrifice, including the notion of the gift, propitiation, expiation,

and reconciliation. Furthermore, he shows that a central concern in Abura-Mfantse sacrifice is safeguarding community life. Finally, a key factor in Ekem's choice to translate *hilastrion* as *ahynanmuadze* is his concern for appropriating Christ's sacrifice among Abura-Mfantse Christians. The stories of self-giving in Abura-Mfantse tradition suggest ways in which Abura-Mfantse Christians might live out notions of sacrifice.

Inculturation Theology: Edison Kalengyo

Second, we turn to the work of Edison Kalengyo.^[64] Kalengyo has made the theme of sacrifice his life's work, exploring it from biblical, cultural, and liturgical angles.^[65] As he observes, "for all Christianity has meant to Africa, the Christian understanding of sacrifice has not been clarified in societies for which sacrifice lay at the heart of their traditional religion."^[66] In his Ugandan context, this is an urgent need because of its implications for Christian identity and practice, especially as traditional ritual sacrifices remain common. He writes,

The elaborate sacrificial system of the Ganda has, by and large, remained intact to date (albeit some of the sacrificial rituals being performed in great secrecy). There is even a reported increase in the once abandoned ritual of human sacrifice. This is despite clearly defined and stated Church dogma backed by extensive preaching of the gospel of Christ and relentless condemnation of the traditional practice of sacrifice from the pulpits every Sunday.^[67]

Kalengyo seeks to address this pressing need by demonstrating how Jesus's sacrifice can be appropriated in the Ugandan context through the contextual celebration of the Lord's Supper.^[68]

Kalengyo combines an inculturation approach, drawing on the work of Brian Hearne, with a tripolar interpretive process, drawing on the work of Christina Grenholm, Daniel Patte, and Jonathan Draper.^[69] Following Hearne, Jesus is a "completely 'inculturated' human being, a Jew, a Galilean, brought up in the religious and cultural traditions of his people."^[70] At the same time, "Jesus the Jew is now the universal man, the 'transcultural person,' the one who is the everlasting home for all peoples of all cultures."^[71] For Kalengyo, this means that Christ "is able to effectively communicate with people of all nations and effect the eternal salvation for which he came in the first place."^[72] Kalengyo is very aware of the dangers of syncretism and emphasizes the need for biblical contextual interpretations. As he writes, "All contextual inculturation studies and practices of the sacrificial death of Christ must have as their foundation a clear understanding of the sacrifice of Christ in the New Testament."^[73] First, he examines the biblical text, arguing that sacrifice is a key concept in the Pauline Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews for explaining the death of Jesus and its benefits for believers.^[74] Then he analyses the context, examining Ganda culture, especially the sacrificial system. He deliberately avoids espousing one theory of sacrifice as he observes that Ganda sacrifices are often "multifunctional": "What was a gift was at the same time a thanksgiving sacrifice that ended in a communal meal that enhanced communication, friendship and communion with the deity."^[75] Finally, he addresses the question of appropriation. Jesus's words at the Last Supper draw heavily on the language of sacrifice, suggesting that the Lord's Supper is the key to appropriating the sacrifice of Christ.^[76]

Kalengyo's story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of incarnation, and the concept of culture plays a larger role: Since the fall, human nature and culture have been tainted by sin. For humans to be saved and culture transformed, sin must be dealt with through sacrifice. Before the incarnation, God was at work in Jewish culture and other cultures to create an understanding of who he is and what salvation is. This process reached its fulfillment in Jesus, especially at the cross. Now the process of incarnation continues, primarily through the inculturation of the Lord's Supper.^[77]

For Kalengyo, the Lord's Supper is the interface between Jesus's sacrifice and Ganda sacrifice. Historically, Anglican missionaries in Uganda avoided using sacrificial language in the liturgy, but this needs to be reassessed in light of the Scriptures.^[78] The sacrificial language used at the Last Supper suggests that Christ's sacrifice should be understood in terms of gift, atonement, substitution, covenant, and communion.^[79] Kalengyo therefore argues that language from the Ganda sacrificial system should be used to convey the meaning of Jesus's sacrifice as clearly as possible in the eucharistic celebration. He observes that *ekitambiro*, the general word for sacrifice, is multivocal and is associated with well-being, protection, and healing. Given this, he suggests that the Lord's Supper should be called *Ekitambiro eky'Okwebaza*, "a sacrifice of thanksgiving."^[80] He also suggests that *ekyonziira*, the word for a traditional scapegoat sacrifice, should be used to convey the atoning aspect of Jesus's sacrifice.^[81] Furthermore, Kalengyo notes that there is also a word for nonritual sacrifices that can be used to translate the concept of living sacrifice in Romans 12:1, but he does not explore this further.^[82]

Envisaging the significance of Jesus's sacrifice in relation to Ganda sacrifice has important implications for celebrating the Lord's Supper. First, Kalengyo argues that locally available food and drink, such as banana bread and banana beer or

wine,^[83] should be presented by members of the congregation to show that “they are not merely called to participate in Christ’s sacrifice, but also to continue it by offering the fruits of their labour to God.”^[84] Second, believing ancestors should be acknowledged during the prayers offered at the eucharistic celebration.^[85] Third, Kalengyo suggests that the daily concerns of the people, such as well-being, protection, and healing, should be sought in the blood of Jesus, and one of the ways of doing this is by invoking the blood of Jesus in prayer.^[86] Finally, just as sacrificial meals in Ganda culture included every clan member, so the Lord’s Supper should include the members of God’s extended family from other denominations.^[87]

Like Ekem, Kalengyo gives a dialogical typological account of sacrifice. In line with inculturation theology, he understands the sacrifice of Christ as ending and fulfilling Ganda sacrifice. He also notes that there is a word for nonritual sacrifice, although he does not pursue this further because his focus is on the Lord’s Supper. Furthermore, he emphasizes multiple aspects of sacrifice, including the notion of the gift, the communal meal, and the strong association in Ganda culture between sacrifice and life, especially well-being, protection, and healing. Finally, Kalengyo’s main contribution is in the area of appropriation. Understanding Christ’s sacrifice in terms of Ganda sacrifice suggests important ways in which Ganda Christians can celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a more biblical and contextual way.

Women’s Theology: Mercy Oduyoye

Third, we turn to the work of Mercy Oduyoye.^[88] In one of her earliest papers, presented at the first Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) conference in Accra, Oduyoye highlights the theme of communal sacrifice. As she pointedly observes,

African women have a traditional belief in the benefit of sacrifice for the community. Sacrifice, taken seriously, can lead to social reforms and to lifestyles that are less wasteful and more mindful of humanity’s stewardship of life and ultimate dependence on the Source-Being. But I have difficulty understanding why it is the prerogative of only one sex to sacrifice for the community’s well-being.^[89]

In the same paper, she connects this notion of sacrifice with the doctrine of atonement. As she writes,

In both African religion and Christianity, when life is sacrificed, when it is given back to God, it is made sacred and harmony is restored. This belief is embodied in the Christian doctrine of atonement. A fresh statement of this belief, which uses African ideas of sacrifice and covenants, will enable African religion to contribute to humankind’s religious development.^[90]

Sacrifice has been a recurring theme in her work ever since. Given that Baker and Green see their work as a response to feminist criticism of atonement theology, it is noteworthy that Oduyoye offers a carefully nuanced defense of the notion of sacrifice.

Oduyoye’s work responds to both inculturation theology and liberation theology and draws on aspects of both in her attempt to give African women a voice in theological discussion. Her main starting point is her experience of the sacrifice of women in the African church, but she is also appreciative of the sacrifices that the missionaries made in their work.^[91] As she writes, “The spirit of sacrifice and dedication found among workers in the missionary institutions was unique . . . it was this spirit that the African appreciated. The missionaries did not just preach sacrifice; they acted it out.”^[92] For Oduyoye, mission and sacrifice are closely connected. In her understanding of the church in mission, Christians are sent by Christ, which always means “forgoing one thing in order to undertake another.”^[93] Therefore, “Christians individually and corporately as the church are called to a life of sacrifice.”^[94] Nevertheless, she acknowledges that this takes on different forms in different times and places. For Oduyoye, African sacrificial beliefs and practices are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ. First, she examines ritual sacrifice in African Traditional Religion and self-sacrifice in African society to situate her discussion in its particular context.^[95] Second, she examines the sacrifice of women in the African church. Third, she turns to the example of Christ in the Scriptures and its implications for the African church.

Oduyoye’s story of sacrifice is set within a narrative of liberation: Since the fall, humans have found themselves in oppressive and dehumanizing situations. In order to be saved, they need to be liberated and formed into a new community. In Jewish and African cultures, God atoned for and reconciled people to each other by making covenants with them. Jesus proclaimed a new covenant in his blood at the Last Supper, forming a new community. The process of community building continues through participation in the sacraments, especially the Lord’s Supper, and the sacrifice of the whole community of women and men.^[96]

Like Kalengyo, Oduyoye sees the Lord’s Supper as central to appropriating the sacrifice of Christ. As she observes, “From the perspective of Africa, an interpretation of the Eucharist that highlights the aspect of sacrifice is one that will

touch people's spirituality in such a way as to affect their lives."^[97] Oduyoye, however, goes further than Kalengyo in her discussion of Christian sacrifice. She observes that in African Traditional Religions, sacrifices are made in response to crises that could harm the community's life, which includes both stories of human sacrifice and practices of nonhuman sacrifice. In the former, "in dire circumstances human beings have been sacrificed to restore health, wholeness and safety to whole communities."^[98] In the latter, "what is given up has no will of its own; yet the sacrifice is, or is expected to be, efficacious, because it represents the willingness of the human-offerers to 'give up' what they see as their possession in order to bring about more good."^[99] There are also sacrifices of thanksgiving that cultivate the gift economy, unity, and identity within a group, all of which are essential for communal life. In traditional African society, the sacrifices of women are closely related to this notion of sacrifice for the community.^[100] Nevertheless, Oduyoye distinguishes between making a sacrifice and being sacrificed. Many women are sacrificed against their will – in the home, in society, and even in the church – but there are also women who deliberately choose to give up their lives for others, making a "reasonable sacrifice" that can be characterized as "a process of 'self-emptying.'"^[101] Oduyoye suggests that men and women are called to make this kind of sacrifice. As she argues,

If the church can begin to function more effectively as an instrument of Christ, it must follow the sacrificial life of the woman. Not as the sacrificed, but as the one consciously and deliberately becoming a living sacrifice, taking up the cross voluntarily. In this way, it will be following its Lord, who dedicated his whole life to the announcement of the kingdom by word and deed.^[102]

For Oduyoye, such a vision has important implications for the question of women's ministry and how the church practices hospitality.^[103]

Like Ekem and Kalengyo, Oduyoye gives a dialogical typological account of sacrifice, but she explicitly makes women's experiences the starting point for her approach. She pays close attention to concepts of both ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice in African cultures in order to discover how they have shaped the sacrificial lives of African women. Like Ekem and Kalengyo she emphasizes multiple aspects of sacrifice, including reconciliation, expiation, and the notion of the gift, and stresses that the goal of sacrifice is always the fullness of life. Oduyoye offers a carefully nuanced articulation of Christian sacrifice that involves both women and men and has direct consequences for the life of the church, especially women's ministry and Christian hospitality.

Conclusion

Baker and Green are yet to engage more deeply with African theologians. If they were to do so, it could lead to an important reassessment of their understanding of sacrifice, as well as their rather disparaging assessment of what African reflection on sacrifice can contribute to substantive theological issues. First, Baker and Green's metaphorical spiritualizing approach needs to become more typological if it is to do justice to the sheer diversity of sacrificial concepts in cultures worldwide. Ekem, Kalengyo, and Oduyoye's dialogical typological approaches avoid superimposing an essentialized and generalized notion of sacrifice on other systems of sacrifice, allowing the universal and the particular to be brought together in a way that enriches the sense of the Christian tradition. Second, Baker and Green focus primarily on ritual sacrifice in their understanding of the atonement and overlook the rich notions of self-sacrifice in Western and African cultures. Ekem, Kalengyo, and Oduyoye pay careful attention to both. Third, Baker and Green's reduction of sacrifice to moral self-giving ignores other themes that need to be explored in order to develop a fuller polythetic concept of sacrifice. Ekem, Kalengyo, and Oduyoye explore multiple themes, such as the gift, the communal meal, and reconciliation, which help to bring out further aspects of Christ's sacrifice. Fourth, Baker and Green strongly associate sacrifice with death, whereas Ekem, Kalengyo, and Oduyoye see it as the key to the fullness of life. Finally, Baker and Green's focus on understanding and articulation needs to be given a more ecclesial form. Intellectual comprehension is no substitute for liturgical and spiritual formation. For Ekem, "appropriability" is an important criterion when choosing how to translate biblical concepts of sacrifice into African languages. For Kalengyo, the contextual celebration of the Lord's Supper is where "the incarnate and risen Lord Jesus Christ meets with the Ganda and bestows the benefits of his sacrificial death to the faithful through faith."^[104] For Oduyoye, "the Christ-event calls *both men and women* to the twin experience of cross and resurrection. . . . We risk sacrifice and cross, we struggle against evil and endure many scars, because armed with hope we already see life defeating death."^[105] I hope that this "encounter" will encourage more engagement between Western and African theologians on the concept of sacrifice.

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